



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

1875 Century Boulevard
Atlanta, Georgia 30345In Reply Refer To:
FWS/R4/ES

SEP 28 2005

Mr. Kenneth Haddad
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation
Commission
620 South Meridian Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1600Dear ~~Mr. Haddad~~ *Ken*:

The Fish and Wildlife Service is preparing to initiate development of an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Florida Panther Response Plan. As the lead agency for this project, we are seeking your cooperation based on both your jurisdiction by law and special expertise on Florida panther environmental issues that should be addressed in the EA.

We are inviting the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to be a "Cooperating Agency" in this project as defined by the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), section 1508.5. We expect Cooperating Agencies to participate in drafting the environmental document, identifying Florida panther environmental issues, and assisting in the development of the EA purpose and need statement. If you decide to act as a Cooperating Agency for the EA, we hope you will commit personnel adequate to develop pertinent information and to prepare environmental analyses based on your expertise and area of jurisdiction, with direction from the Service.

The Service focuses the efforts of Cooperating Agencies on topics for which the agency has expertise and appropriate data or information. For example, it would be beneficial to our project if we could request the assistance of Mr. Darrell Land, lead for south Florida panther research. His many years of panther experience and research, as well as his involvement in the development of the Florida Panther Response Plan, would constitute exceptional value added to us in this project. Whomever you propose, we will use their expertise and suggestions to the extent possible, consistent with our responsibility as lead agency.

If your agency is not inclined, or does not have the resources to act in a Cooperating Agency status, but would like to be involved in the EA process, a potential role may be afforded to your agency as "reviewer" of the preliminary draft EA. We encourage you to consider the unique role of a Cooperating Agency in this project, and determine which role(s), if any, is most appropriate for your purposes.

TAKE PRIDE
IN AMERICA 

Mr. Haddad

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Thank you for your continued interest in the future of the Florida panther. Please be advised that a response to this invitation to be a Cooperating Agency is required under CEQ regulation 1501.6 (c). Should you decide not to accept, you must respond in writing and submit a copy of your reply to the CEQ. Please feel free to direct questions regarding the EA process to Ms. Layne Hamilton, Florida Panther and Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge, at (239) 353-8442, extension 227. Questions regarding Cooperating Agencies and NEPA may be directed to Mr. Jeffrey Weller, Southeast Regional Office, at (404) 679-7217.

Sincerely yours,

//s//Sam D. Hamilton

Sam D. Hamilton
Regional Director